

AB 374

California Compassionate Choices Act: Facts About Aid in Dying and People Living with Disabilities

Compassionate Choice is Completely in Line with the Goals of the Independent Living Movement

The California Compassionate Choices Act treats disabled people exactly the same as it treats everyone else: it simply gives terminally ill mentally competent adults, disabled or not, the power to choose the time, place and circumstances of their death.

Key Disability Rights Leaders Support Compassionate Choices for the Terminally Ill:



“As a former leader in the disability rights movement and as an individual with a disability, I strongly support [aid in

dying]. This law protects the rights of individuals to talk with their doctors and family about one of the most important decisions of their life: how they choose to spend their final days. The safeguards in this bill are carefully balanced and distinguish between disabling conditions and those that meet the strict tests of terminal illness and mental competence for eligible patients. While I understand that there is fear around this law for some, it is not a fear based on fact. The rhetoric from opponents who promote intolerance undermines the principles of autonomy and diversity that have been the foundation of the disability rights movement.”

Russ Kletzing, former president, National Federation of the Blind

“I live with disabilities, and I embrace life. I am in favor of terminally ill patients having choice and control at the end of life. This does not threaten people with disabilities, it empowers us. I have spent much of my life working to protect vulnerable elderly and disabled Californians.

[Aid in dying] will help all terminally ill patients face the end of life with more dignity, choice and control.”

Dee Erman, Member, California Senior Legislature, Congress of California Seniors



“[Aid in dying] isn’t about disability rights, it’s about personal choice. Something the disability community is unanimously in favor of when it comes to living.

“As a person with a lifelong disability who is actively engaged personally and professionally in a myriad of Independent

Living Movement issues, [aid in dying] is about many things that are vitally important to Americans, but first and last, it is about dignity.

“Isn’t making a well-controlled choice to die a few days or weeks sooner from a terminal illness, in a time and manner of one’s own choosing, a choice made by the living? How do we dare to take away final choices from the terminally ill, based on our own fears of being left out of the mainstream?

“Warnings of a slippery slope toward outright euthanasia are another ‘wolf cry’ by opponents pushing their agendas into other peoples’ private lives. Oregon’s experience proves the slope wasn’t

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slippery at all, but rather well conceived and well-managed.”

“Pass [aid in dying] so we can all approach our deaths with more choices, more control and more dignity.”

Disability Rights Advocate Alan Toy

“I support the bill because of the safeguards.”

Disability Rights Advocate Daniel Barnes

“I know that rank and file people with disabilities just like those without disabilities want choices and options in a fair, equitable playing field.”

Disability Rights Advocate F. Burns Vick, Jr., J.D.

“Persons with disabilities are far more vulnerable in states where the transparency of the Oregon law does not exist.”

Paul Spiers, AUTONOMY, Inc. Board President

FAQ about Aid in Dying

Q. Wouldn't people with disabilities be more likely to choose assisted dying under this law?

A. No. Experience from Oregon proves this. All of the people who have chosen to invoke Oregon's Death with Dignity Act have been in the last stages of a terminal illness like cancer, AIDS, or ALS. Disability has not been a factor.

Q. But doesn't this bill create the possibility of assisted dying by disabled people who could otherwise live?

A. Absolutely not! Only terminally ill mentally competent adults, disabled or not, would be able to invoke the law. No one who is not terminally ill could choose aid in dying under this act. Disability does not qualify anyone for this choice.

Q. Don't disabled people oppose this law because they're afraid of it?

A. Opinion Polls show that people with disabilities have the same desire for autonomy, freedom, and self-control at the end of their lives that everyone else has. Three consecutive Harris Polls have shown that over 60% of people with disabilities believe in a mentally competent terminally ill person's right to choose assisted dying (68% in the 2001 Harris Poll).

Q. But aren't disabled people more likely to choose assisted dying because they're vulnerable?

A. People with disabilities value life and power and freedom as much, maybe more, than everyone else. In any case, only those diagnosed with less than six months to live are eligible to make this choice.

Q. How many people with disabilities who were not terminally ill have died invoking Oregon's law?

A. Not a single one.

Opponents of Compassionate Choices say this could lead to a “slippery slope” making it more acceptable to let disabled people die.

That has not happened at all in Oregon. And this bill has even more safeguards to prevent any possibility of that.

Q. Won't greedy HMO's and uncaring doctors use this as a way to make profits, by having disabled consumers choose assisted dying rather than receive expensive care?

A. HMO's and doctors would have no power whatsoever to do anything except respect their patients' wishes. The choice is entirely the individual's. The safeguards built into aid in dying ensure that nothing like that can happen.

California Compassionate Choices Act

Dignity, Freedom, Power,
Autonomy for Everyone